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16.1.12

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EXPERIENCES

OF A

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT.

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MANCHESTER:

PUBLISHED BY G. RENSHAW, 5, BELLHOUSE COURT, CROSS STREET.

16.H.1.12

# CRIMINAL MANCHESTER.

## EXPERIENCES OF A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT.

*Reprinted from the Manchester Evening News.*

### I.

#### CHARTER STREET: PAST AND PRESENT.

THE truth of the rather trite saying that half the world knows not how the other half lives is so generally acknowledged that ignorance of certain phases of life in our city can be pleaded with equanimity by the vast majority of us. We do not take the trouble to inquire what is going on in circles very far below us, and are as little acquainted with the existence led by the poverty-stricken or the vicious in our back streets and courts as if a great gulf divided us. Their ways are not our ways, and it is only when the light shed by policial or other authority is turned upon this hidden under-world that we see aught of its nature. But this light is in many respects a false one, as it illuminates but the more salient features and belongings of the scene it reveals, leaving in greater darkness much that is important and characteristic. We accept the revelation given, and do not care to venture beyond the circle marked out by this artificial guide, for we are as little fearful of prying too deeply into the secret of the minority that is at times so troublesome and dangerous. In spite of all this, the maxim that has been applied to the highest class is applicable to the lowest: "You may keep this minority out of sight and out of mind, but it is tenacious of life, and is one of the estates of the realm." Being so, it is worth examining curiously, and from the knowledge gained by temporary association with what is termed "low life," I may be able to give some idea of what is transpiring even now in our midst among the outcasts and pariahs of the community. How the association has been formed matters not, save that it had its present purpose in view, and was not called into being by idle curiosity or senseless intrusion. Piloted by one who has returned but recently from penal servitude, or as he would say from "doing a

seven stretch," I sank my identity for a time, and gained an insight into "crooked" life which is at once interesting and novel.

I must first explain that in Manchester there are four districts in which are located our criminal population, which may be enumerated as Charter-street, part of Deansgate, Ancoats, and Gaythorne. The first named is bounded by a portion of Rochdale-road, Angel-street, Crown-lane, part of Red Bank, Beswick's Row, Long Millgate, and a number of streets leading up to Smithfield Market. This is the head quarters, practically, of the thieving fraternity, and with it I will first deal, leaving a description of the other districts to a future article. My guide keeping his appointment in Long Millgate with marvellous punctuality, we commenced our wanderings into what was to me an entirely unknown locality about ten o'clock at night. We struck off at once in the direction of Charter-street, and on the way I was entertained with a long and querulous complaint on the bad state of "business" which is worth reproducing. It was to the old tune of "times was times then," and contained a vast amount of information as to the former state of affairs at a period not so very far distant.

He remembered, seven or eight years ago, how "the Street" (Charter-street) was just as it should be, and what could be done in spite of all the "d's" (detective police) in the city. In the middle of the day from 50 to 100 men, known thieves every one of them, could be seen loitering at corners, "pattering" away in groups of their doings on their various "lays," and laying plans for their next work. If the face of a known constable in plain clothes showed itself at a corner they were off into entries and houses in a second, and the Street would be as deserted as if no crowd had been in it. In at the front door and out at the back, over the yard walls as quick as fear could make them scramble, for each one knew he



might have been "spotted" for some little "job" he had done, and it would not be worth while to wait and be "lagged." Not that they went always quietly, for "the Street" had weapons of its own, and when a rescue was attempted it fared ill with the officers. In many a house was kept hidden a supply of stones, and these were used with great effect. Before the disturbance not half a dozen could have been found on the roadway, but when all was over they could be counted by the hundred. Many a hard fight was waged with the police, who did not always come off without serious hurt. Joe Hyde then kept the London Tavern, which was recognised as the great place of resort of "cross-men" (thieves) from all parts of the country, and there the 'cutest of the fraternity most did congregate. They were men who could pass muster in a crowd, and were well dressed and had plenty of ready coin to spend. "Why, I've seen," suddenly my companion breaks out, "a dozen of 'em playing cards all night, and the table covered with sovereigns. £5 a corner, and all paid up at the finish. We could manage it all right then, and come direct to the Street, but now we have to go outside, anywhere where we can get a place, for we should get hauled up sharp if we went to old quarters. Then there was Teddy and Bob Butterworth's; but they've got a ten and twelve stretch while I've been away. They could sleep twenty or thirty of us every night, and we put up there as nice as could be. We used to drop nearly all the stuff at Bob Macfarlane's, and a good fence (receiver) he was then. Some went to Patsey Reardon's, but he's dead, and his old woman is doing time for taking in some two or three hundred watches from the "guns" (pickpockets). One-armed Kitty and Cabbage Ann are still here; but it's a hot shop now to work in. Fencing isn't half what it was before the "Act," and "getting" watches even isn't worth the trouble. You can't place half of 'em, and when you do it's but a trifle. I might do a bit o' "ale-and-portering" (working and thieving), but not in Manchester. All the old 'uns are gone away, and everything's changed for the bad." This was the burden of the complaint, and it is true that the Habitual Criminals Act, generally known to the "profession" as the "Act," or the "New Act," has crippled the extensive operations of convicts immensely. Formerly the line that divided the thief proper from the working men and hawkers on the one hand and vagrants on the other was clearly defined, but now it can no longer be traced. Thieving alone is too hazardous, and as my experienced friend put it, "ale-and-portering" is considered most profitable. A little bit of work, hawking or otherwise, with a spice of thieving, pays well, and can be pursued with impunity for a time. There are very few persons at the present time who subsist entirely on the proceeds of continual and systematic theft.

By the time I had been put in possession of these facts we had got well into the Street, and a number

of suspicious-looking men and youths could be seen standing at the corners near the public-houses that are pretty thickly scattered about the neighbourhood. They were slovenly dressed, and had a listless heavy look about them that gave an idea of mental and bodily depression. We looked into several liquor vaults, and in most of them the counterparts of the men outside were drinking. They were not particularly noisy, though their talk was coarse and brutal, as I of course anticipated. They were of the usual "rough type," and were as good specimens as could be picked out of any of our large gaols. They seemed to have no object in drinking save to while away the time, and many sat smoking on the low wooden seats, without joining in the conversation or exhibiting sociability in any way. They were content with their position in the glare and warmth of the gas light, and the stolid unintelligent gaze they turned on their companions was as purposeless as can be imagined. Thinking it as well to follow suit in the drinking, we entered a more pretentious house than we had yet seen, and after passing a long well-lighted bar, with a spacious counter that would have accommodated some fifty persons we gained a small room leading out of an adjoining passage. It was a decently furnished, snug smoke-room, and in it were four men engaged in a subdued conversation, which they broke off as soon as we entered. Some money was lying on the table, and one of them was about to gather it up when my companion made use of some "back slang," which I could not comprehend, and they resumed their task of apparently dividing the money. Each man eventually got a couple of sovereigns, and some loose silver that was left was spent in glasses of whisky. They were more respectable in appearance, and their talk was less slangy than the men I had seen in the other drinking places, but all of them had been convicted of felony, and one, a little stumpy man, with a face bespeaking low cunning, was just out "on ticket." With a convict's carelessness, he was again associating with his old companions in spite of the risk of being sent back to finish his time. Two of the others were strangers, but, as I learned from scraps of conversation, they had "done the boat" (the slang term for the now abolished system of transportation) from London. They had only been in the town a few days, and were living out in the direction of Queen's-road, as they would not trust themselves in the lodging-houses of the Street, where they might be recognised and watched by the "slops" (police). We had only time to drink our liquor hastily, for it was eleven o'clock, and we were soon out into the Street again. At the corner were standing a couple of men, whom I identified as belonging to our local detective force, and as they moved towards us the cockney strangers broke away from our group, and walked rapidly across the Street. I felt inclined to follow, but was pulled back by my guide, and turning sharply round we stepped into a

dark narrow entry, and with a sense of utter helplessness I stumbled along as best I could, the ground being rough and uneven, and not a ray of light visible to show whither I was going. I nearly came to grief several times in treacherous puddles that had collected in stray holes, and it was only by touching either wall with my outstretched hands that I could progress at all. Suddenly I found myself out in the open air, in what was evidently a back court; but the yard was so small, and the night so dark, that I could see no passage by which we could make our way out. "We musn't be seen," said my faithful convict, and stepping cautiously to the door of one of the houses he rapped quietly but distinctly. The effect was anything but encouraging, for a dog inside gave tongue immediately and to judge from the energy with which he flew to the door he would have been a ferocious customer to deal with. It appeared as if he would get at us, and as we could hear some one stirring in the room we beat a rapid retreat. "Follow me, sharp," was all the instruction I got, and we were again off in the darkness through such a devious maze of courts and passages that I wondered what particular part of the city we should arrive at. We got out safely, albeit I was bruised and dirty, from falling against such trifling obstacles as the corners of walls and a few broken-down steps, and to my surprise we were in Charter-street. All was quiet, and we passed over and entered one of the houses, which I was told was the "begging-ken."

## CHAPTER II.

## LIFE IN CHARTER-STREET.

The "begging-ken" was gained after passing through a long passage leading into a room, which was large enough to accommodate with comfort the dozen persons, male and female, that were sitting on either side of a large deal table. They were of the *genus* "cadger," but wore a very different look to that put on when pursuing their vocation of pestering well-to-do people for alms. They were dressed in their ordinary clothes to be sure, and their "looped and windowed raggedness" showed up strangely in the light of the great fire which roared in the wide grate. They seemed as much at home as it was possible to imagine, and were smoking filthy clay pipes and exchanging confidences with perfect freedom. There was no whining cant in their voices now, for they had only fellow-cheaters to deal with, and they accordingly appeared in their true colours. They took but very little notice of us, for supper was nearly ready, and a savoury odour rose from a huge iron pot that was simmering and bubbling on the fire. One of the hobs, too, was fitted with a kitchen boiler, and the steam was blowing off at an alarming rate. I was curious to know how these vagabonds dined, for the meal they were about to take was really dinner, though enjoyed at a later

hour than even the most aristocratic in the land would care to fix. Some common earthenware plates, which at least looked clean in spite of their dilapidated state, were placed on the bare table, and a knife and fork of exceedingly venerable aspect were assigned to each person. Pipes were put out, carefully and even tenderly deposited in the owners' pockets, for strange is the love of the vagrant for his soothing comforter, and in another minute the pot was standing on the hearth, and beef-steak and onions were being distributed to each hungry wanderer. A loaf of aldermanic proportions graced the centre of the board, and giant slices were cut from it and eagerly seized. Having watched the "feed" for a short time, until every mouth was full and nothing could be heard but the harsh clatter of steel and platter, varied with the uncouth noises made when the vulgar eat, we took our leave. This "ken" has an immense reputation among the cadging and tramp fraternity, as they can always ensure good treatment if they have the means of paying a very small charge, and it is needless to say they have always these means. Here they arrange the districts in which they shall work the city and the neighbourhood, and map out with wonderful 'cuteness and sagacity the route each shall take. Their organisation is not so perfect as in the metropolis, but the method is the same; and a rough sketch has even been discovered in which the most prominent features of the suburbs were clearly shown. Their mendicancy is far too skilled for haphazard begging.

The next house we visited was somewhat different in character to this place in which vagrants assembled, and partook more of the genuine nature of a thieves' rendezvous. Entering direct from the street we were in a small room, well furnished, with the walls hung with a number of gaudy engravings, and a large quantity of cheap china ornaments and glassware standing on a sideboard. The fire-place was to our left, and to the right of it, and in fact immediately adjoining it, was a bedstead in which the proprietor of the establishment was sleeping. He rose bolt upright on seeing my guide (whom, for convenience, I will henceforth call Mac), and I had a good chance of seeing his face. It was that of a man prematurely old, and the grizzled military moustache stood out from the livid and haggard face with singular effect. There was a blazing fire within a few inches of him,—his hand, in fact, if stretched out, could have touched the bars, and yet he shivered and drew the clothes about his shoulders as he asked "What's up?" He lay down again quietly on hearing that "a pal was bein' shown round," and told us there was somebody in the kitchen. At the foot of the bed was a wide doorway, and, after a short struggle with a stubborn latch, we had an opportunity of seeing who this somebody was. The room had nothing very characteristic in its general outline, the walls being white-washed and fairly clean, and the ceiling blackened



and discoloured with smoke. A flight of stairs led up to the bedrooms, and on the bottom step I ensconced myself, while Mac fraternised with a couple of men who were lounging on a bench with the customary careless and limp bearing that is noticeable about your man of questionable repute. The place was excessively hot, for a gas jet was flaring away, while the fire, more extensive than any I had yet seen, was roaring up the chimney. It may seem strange to refer so constantly to the presence of these fires, but I was struck with the lavishness with which the coal was used, and the evident pleasure afforded to those who were gathered round them. It is natural, perhaps, that warmth and the comfort inspired by the glow of a "reeming" fire should be particularly sought after in a profession which drives its votaries into hardship and privation in the open air; but whatever the cause may be, the fact remains that thief and vagrant are extravagantly partial to a good, wholesome, English coal-fire.

I sat on the stairs listening with no particular interest to what was being related of various people, of a certain importance, I supposed, in their several lives, until my attention was attracted by two or three coarse expressions addressed to a girl who seemed to be unusually quiet and reserved. She was a mill-hand, apparently, and had the typical check shawl of her class over her shoulders. She was not above 18 years of age, and would have been good-looking but for two or three ugly scars that disfigured her cheek. She kept turning to a youth about her own age, who was seated at the end of the bench nearest the fire, and attempted to raise a laugh by two or three jokes remarkable for nothing but their breadth of meaning, which embraced more than I should like to say. Her "man" would not be mollified, and sulkily smoked his pipe, only opening his lips to use bad language of the highest order. He was a good specimen of his kind; clear, sharp face, with marks of manhood before youth had passed away; closely cropped hair, almost hidden by a tight-fitting cap that showed his ears with uncommon effectiveness; and a wisp of dirty white handkerchief tied loosely round his throat. He rose once to light his pipe, and I could see the gleam of his brass-tipped clogs as he shuffled to the fire. Mac chaffed him on his bad temper, and suggested he should "square-up with the gal," but he only got more savage and swore more continuously. While reflecting what a splendid *Charley Bates* he would make if only an *Artful Dodger* were forthcoming, I was considerably startled by an inscription in large red letters over the chimney piece. It was so incongruous that I could scarcely believe my eyes; but through all the covering of dirt and dust I read—

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.

However the text had reached its position I could

not imagine, but I must confess to being greatly shocked at hearing the profanity indulged in beneath that Commandment of the Ten which inculcates chastity of speech and thought. True that perhaps only myself and my companion could read, but it seemed as if the finger of old that had written "Mene, mene," had traced in letters of blood the solemn warning against blasphemy which now looked down upon the reckless beings I was among. I hastened to leave the place, for, though no purist, I could not coolly listen to more cursing, with such an eloquent monitor before me; and with a sidelong glance at the scroll, half obliterated with finger-marks, smoke, and kindred filth, yet standing out from the drear wall with the vitality of inspiration, I made my way into the front room. Its occupant was again asleep, and the flickering fire-light threw strange shadows over his face as he moved uneasily in bed. We noiselessly opened the door, and once again were in the open, with the reek of tobacco and the stuffiness of the hot rooms still clinging to us.

I tried to elicit from Mac some information as to the presence of the strange text in the house we had left, but he knew nothing of it, and had looked upon it with the callous eye of a man who has sat untouched under prison chaplains and wondered what "the patter was all about." He said he had seen the "diarrhoea paper," which was pasted up on the wall, and of which he had a high opinion. This was in allusion to the notice issued, I believe, by the lodging-house inspectors, which has been circulated extensively in our lowest slums, and has done a certain amount of good, in spite of the ignorance of many who could not read its sensible directions. We left Charter-street and walked quietly along an adjacent thoroughfare, which was as silent as if it were one of the bye-ways of the City of the Dead. Mac told me the houses were "respectable," which I interpreted to mean of a character superior to common lodging-kens, and in this I was confirmed when he added that the "fly" men, who were never "lagged," lived in them. This means rogues who do their thieving so cleverly and with such precautions against detection, that the police cannot, perhaps for years, convict them, although they are morally convinced of their guilt. One of the front doors stood wide open, and at the end of the low narrow passage leading to the back kitchen a brilliant light was shining. We walked in, and there, comfortably enjoying their midnight drink and smoke, were two respectably-dressed men, who might have passed for clerks or warehousemen. There was nothing in their appearance to create suspicion, and after resting for a few minutes and joining them in a pipe, I left with the impression that they must have retired long ago from public life. I gave utterance to these sentiments, and was pulled up by a sarcastic chuckle from Mac, who disabused my mind of all illusions by stating that "they were the two clev'rest hooks



(pickpockets) in the city, but only worked at fairs and races." They had been very successful too, he told me, and had had "all luck" in very seldom being "jugged" (locked up). One or two other of these "respectable" habitations we looked into, and shortly after, we wended our way back to the Street, Cabbage Ann's being our destination, and there a surprise awaited us.

### CHAPTER III.

## WHAT FOLLOWED IN CHARTER-STREET.

We passed straightway into the back kitchen down the customary passage, and were in the sanctum of "Cabbage Ann," who is well known to the vast majority of persons "on the cross" in the whole country. Her fame had reached my ears long before I had ever heard where she was located, and I was impatient to obtain a glimpse of so notorious a personage. There was a number of women and lads sitting in the room, but the keeper herself of the establishment was not there. From the upper regions, however, came noises which showed that something unusual was taking place, and great was our surprise when, in answer to a question as to what was up there, one of the women surlily jerked out, "A dead man, if ye want to know." Such, indeed, was the case, for a member of the fraternity, eminent as a pickpocket—he might indeed have been called a great "gun"—had died a day or two before, and the wake was now being held with all due honours. I should have liked much to have been at the wake proper, but on proposing to Mac that we should go upstairs he said it would be impossible for me, even with his introduction, to remain in the place. The worthy Ann was aloft superintending the ceremony of waking, and the woman who had vouchsafed the information as to the proceedings puffed savagely at her short dhudeen, and eyed us with disfavour through the rank tobacco smoke. Two or three of the youths, not more than sixteen or seventeen years old, were more communicative, and said there was "plenty of stuff" to be had. "Stuff" is the generic term for drink and food, and I wondered who had provided both so lavishly. The place looked squalid and miserable, and the people in it were of poor, miserable, appearance as if they found it hard to live at all. The walls were bare and dirty, and the furniture of the rudest and scantiest kind, a rough wooden form doing duty for half a dozen chairs. It did not seem as if much money would be forthcoming in such a barn of a place, and as the youths were mere "snow-droppers," or "linen-lifters" from clothes-lines and hedges, it was not to be expected that they could play the part of generous donors. Mac had again to play the part of Mentor and the mystery was made clear. The money re-

quired to inaugurate the wake and sustain it with fitting dignity was solicited in the neighbourhood, very few of the "crooked" community refusing to give something, and a general appeal being made at the various public-houses. The result was the raising of some three or four pounds, which were spent mostly in drink. It would have been thought that as the money could be so readily obtained there would have been a "big burial," but this is a most absurd notion. However grand might be the wake, the funeral was quite another thing—let the parish authorities see after that. And in this particular case I may as well state the parish *did* have to take charge of the corpse, and it was buried at the expense of the ratepayers after five times as much money as would have paid the undertakers handsomely had been squandered in excesses by the "sorrowing friends" of the dead man. Of these excesses the least said the better, as some of the scenes enacted at the wakes, even at the present time, are too disgusting and horrible to be related.

Murty's lodging-house was our next resting-place, and it exemplified the truth of the old saying relative to "every man's house being his castle," for there was a double door which was barred and bolted as if to resist an attack from without. After a heavy cross-bar had been clanged noisily down upon the floor, and the inner door half opened, we were admitted. I could see nothing but a little sickly gas-flame, that almost gave up its puny life as a draught of the cold night air rushed in, for the room was filled with dense smoke that choked us with its fumes, and made our eyes stream with tears. I stood quite still, for I did not know in which direction to move, and as I became accustomed to the partial darkness I discovered whence the smoke came. At the extreme end of the room was a low open fireplace, in which a fire was smouldering as if it had been damped down, and it was from this that the nuisance arose, for eddying gusts swept down the chimney and leaped up to the sooty ceiling with untiring energy. There was no one at all to be seen save the old woman who had admitted us, and who carried in her hand a primitive candlestick in the shape of an old brown ginger-beer bottle, in which a solitary dip was struggling to keep alight. She ushered us into a smaller room, cautioning us to "mind the steps," as we had to descend a couple of feet. Here there was not so much smoke, and half-a-dozen women, all middle-aged and looking worn out and disreputable, were gathered together smoking and gossiping in a subdued manner, as if they had no interest in their own conversation. One suddenly brightened up for a moment as a man emerged from a corner, and Mac remarked that he must be Brigham Young, with so many wives about him. "We're more respectable than *that* sort," she remarked in a tone meant to convey pride in her own marital relations, whatever they might be, and her companions leered approval with every indication of admiring the sentiment.

By this time the old woman, who had securely fastened the doors, had joined us, and holding her sputtering candle over her head, she preceded us upstairs, where some thirty or forty lodgers were enjoying their night's repose.

The stairs were narrow and steep, with sharp turnings and landing-places in the most unlooked-for corners, and several times I lost sight of my guiding-star, the "glim," which appeared to dance about like a Will-o'-the-wisp. Once I stumbled in the dark, and fell crash against a whitewashed door. A hoarse voice inquired, in most uncivil terms, and even with allusions to a place and personage not very popular, "Who's there?" I replied in as gruff tones that it was "all right," and retraced my steps with a morbid fear of finding myself rolling to the bottom of the stairs. Fortune favoured me, however, and taking the right turn I was without further inconvenience in the main sleeping room. It was one of the strangest places I have ever seen, and yet it would have been hard to improve upon it as regards cleanliness and ventilation. It was a long, wide attic, with boxed-off sleeping compartments running down either side, leaving a pretty broad passage along which to walk. Rude deal doors, with no hinges, were fitted to the compartments, and these had to be lifted and dragged away before admission could be obtained. Every bit of woodwork was as white as snow, for the whole interior had been recently whitewashed, and the cross beams and rafters were of the same colour. Looking inside several of these sleeping boxes I saw that a bed was placed in each, and that there was just room for the lodger to undress and no more. As the glare of the candle fell upon the sleepers' eyes, some started up and stared stupidly about, while others blinked and yawned as if too overcome with sleep to care much about what was going on. The air was as sweet as that of any ordinary dwelling-house, and no wonder, for the sanitary authorities sternly enforce the laws in regard to full accommodation being given to all lodgers. At one end of the dormitory was a low brick archway, as if a partition wall had been sometime broken through, and this led to a further series of beds, each with its occupant. Married couples, or those professing to be included in that category, were provided with beds detached from the general sleepers. I suppose that this dormitory contained many "characters well-known to the police," but they were enjoying good quarters, and slept as soundly as if of the Just. Two or three jokes were bawled out by some sleepless individuals, and as the speakers were at different ends of the garret their voices were pitched in no low key. The ire of the more sedate of the community was aroused at this, and as long as the light remained a Babel of oaths and invectives could be heard. This subsided as we picked our way carefully downstairs.

At "Fat Billy's," not far distant, the accommodation was somewhat similar, though the chambers

generally, being smaller and more numerous, the wooden partitions were differently arranged. In contrast with the whitewash of the walls and ceilings, the doors had all been coated with coal-tar, and the smell of this pervaded the whole house. Its antiseptic qualities are of course well known, and the idea of thus applying them is worthy of encouragement. The floors and beds were scrupulously clean, even though many of the lodgers were far from appreciating the blessings of cleanliness. In the largest room of all were some half dozen beds and here a curious scene was being enacted. A young negro, with face as black as the tarred doors, was sitting on the side of his couch, holding his face between his hands, and swearing in the most horrible broken-English, for he was enduring the scourge of toothache with about as much fortitude as a child exhibits when first becoming acquainted with molar teeth. To add to his discomfort, he was made the butt of his companions, who were exercising their wit upon him with merciless severity. The remedies that were suggested to "darkie" were as astonishing as unique, and he could scarcely refrain from grinning himself at some of the expressions. It was a sight to be remembered, for a more powerful picture it would have been hard to have designed. The low-browed room looked weird and desolate in the half-light, and the figures of the inmates, in every possible attitude and in every variety of motion, showed forth strangely in the gloom. Restless, and with no signs of possible sleep, here was one sitting straight upright in bed; and there, half-dozing, was another reclining with cheek resting upon his uplifted arm; others lay at full length, with their hands locked beneath their heads—a favourite position with your outcast, who has often thus to supply the want of a pillow when shelterless. Some few were lying passively, with eyes closed, heedless of the tumult, and only showing by their uneasy movements that they were not slumbering. And in the midst of all the white figures that shifted and swayed in the uncertain twilight, with ghostly shadows lurking in dark corners and dancing on the walls, there reared itself the dark image of the poor Man of Colour, as if the unholy Genius of the spot had come to mount guard over his subjects. We watched the "fun" until it appeared as if the nigger would never get to rest at all, and thinking I would see if he could stand a practical joke, I pulled out a small penknife and proposed to "cut his gums." This latest advanced cure was received with roars of delight by the rough spirits in bed, but Darkie cried off when I showed him the steel, and suggested that I should put my finger in "and feel." I had too much respect for my own flesh and blood to tempt the unfortunate "contrabrand" to cannibalism, and so left him in his pain to solace himself as best he could.

My stay in the Street had now been protracted to a very early hour, but we gave several other "cross-cribs" a call before leaving the district. In



one of these only was there anything of interest, where a dozen men and women were smoking their cheap tobacco with a relish that was absolutely startling, for they pulled at their stumpy pipes with such vehemence that their very breath seemed to be converted into dense smoke, which hung about their heads, and curled lovingly round their necks as if loth to part company. There was one woman who had the dirtiest pipe, the rankest weed, and the most garrulous tongue, and on the pretence of getting a light from her "clay," I struck up a brief acquaintance. She was a withered, dried-up specimen of the "hoisting" (shoplifting) sisterhood, with a little puckered-up face, expressionless in repose and yet mobile when the eyes peered out sharply at a strange question. Sucking the stem of her pipe with great gusto, she told me how cleverly she had been "pinched" (locked up) for lifting cheese. She was running off with a huge piece of the grocer's property in her arms when she heard an outcry raised behind, and accordingly quietly dropped her booty and walked away. She was caught, and stoutly asserted her innocence, but on the buttons of her dress were the marks of her guilt, and the 'cute "slop" (back slang for a police-officer) fitted the buttons one by one into the corresponding holes in the cheese. "I thow't I was in for a patter" (committal to the sessions), said Irish Kate in conclusion, "but I got off wid two months." She laughed and chuckled over the affair as if she had enjoyed the punishment, and I am not sure that she had not.

#### CHAPTER IV.

### DEANSGATE DENS.

Before dealing with the criminal population which finds its home in the neighbourhood of Deansgate, it may be as well to give some idea of the number of convicts on licence and under police supervision in the city. By the courtesy of the Chief Constable I am enabled to quote the return for the year ending the 29th of September last. From this it appears that 183 convicts on licence and 166 under police supervision, or a total of 349, have been within what may be termed direct control during the past 12 months. Of those on licence about one in every three was a woman, while among those under supervision the sexes were nearly equal, there being 92 males and 74 females. Out of the total of 349 only 27 had been transferred to Manchester from other districts. So that we may claim the other 322 convicted felons as our exclusive property. Of the whole number only 176 remained in the city at the date of the return, the remainder having disposed of themselves, or having been disposed of by the authorities, in various ways. For instance, 29 had been convicted for new offences; 21 had not reported themselves at all; 55 had removed or been transferred to other police districts; and the licences of 35 others had expired. Of those under supervision

26 had been punished for neglecting to report. Only seven licences had been entirely revoked, and this proves how admirably the system of releasing men "on ticket" works where the local police machinery is sufficiently powerful to keep the most dangerous criminals in awe.

As I have before stated, the Deansgate district is an extensive one, comprising the majority of the smaller streets running at right angles from the main thoroughfare between Bridge-street and St. John's-street, and many others of the narrow alleys on the opposite side of the street. Under the guidance which had safely initiated me into the mysteries of Charter-street, I sought to gain an insight into the life which hides itself in perhaps our closest and most uninviting courts, and, choosing a Saturday night for my visit, I saw sufficient to sicken and dismay the most ardent philanthropist that ever studied social economy. Upwards of a hundred houses did I enter upon various excuses, and it would be impossible to describe each in detail. They had many features in common, and the type of misery and debasement presented by their inmates was generally the same. The distinctive characteristics were in the individual, and not in the mode of living. The following were the principal streets I first of all made acquaintance with, and to some of them I will later on refer more intimately:—Wood-street, Spinningfield, Dolefield, Willmott-street, Hardman-street, Royton-street, and Thompson-street. There are very few registered lodging-houses in this neighbourhood, as the tenements are mostly small, two-storey cottages, in which three or four men and women live with their children, if they have those encumbrances, and in which the co-operative spirit is largely exercised, for existence is merely of a hand-to-mouth kind. They are mostly thieves of the lowest order, though many clever pickpockets are also turned out, and the place is a very hotbed of social iniquity and vice. To deal with this latter phase of crime is hardly possible in articles of this nature, but so intimately is the called "social evil" connected with actual offences against the law, that it is difficult to dis sever them. This assertion is particularly applicable to the Deansgate neighbourhood, as, perhaps, is only too notorious. The women are of a class whose degradation is utter, and whose reclamation, as a body, is an absolute impossibility. They only commit theft when detection is practically unable to reach them, and their chief victims are drunken men and country "atflas" (back slang, flats or greenhorns), whom they "pick-up" (rob and rifle pockets), with perfect impunity. The amount of property thus stolen in 12 months, and of which the police are never made cognisant, is enormous. I shall not further touch upon an unpalatable subject, and my only apology is that the ground is considered too dangerous to be circumstantially mapped out for the benefit of the common public.

In Wood-street we were arrested by the sound of music proceeding from what looked like an old beer-house, and on entering we came upon a party of a dozen youths and girls assembled in a half-furnished room, which resembled a taproom, listening to a "hurdy-gurdy" man grinding out a lugubrious waltz and a red-faced girl, with a glaring red shawl over her shoulders, shaking a tambourine. The audience was a small one, but there was enough dirt and old clothes among them to stock a marine-store dealer. They were altogether more disreputable-looking than the denizens of Charter-street; the women were all bareheaded, save the strata of cheap oil and the dust of weeks which covered their hair, and the men were in a chronic state of tight-fitting cloth caps and large parti-coloured mufflers. "Peter," the master of the house, was out, and it was not until I had passed into an inner room that I was aware that I was not in a public-house. I fully expected to come across a bar, but only met a woman with a child in her arms who looked weak and sickly. I learned that the premises had once been licensed, but they had suffered disestablishment some time since. The remnants of their old glory were visible in the presence of innumerable gaudy paintings on the walls representing subjects the most diverse. Once I was confronted by Caxton "pulling a proof" with his first rude machine from his wooden type, and in another second I started on discovering two or three pugilistic celebrities, in a remarkably airy undress, sparring at me from their tinsel frames. It was as if the Spirit of the place dumbly appealed to the inmates not to forget its ancient name and fame, but these are already things of the past, and the short span that marks a generation in these infamous quarters will blot them out altogether.

Coming out of this queer habitation we passed down the street until opposite a huxter's shop lighted by an oil lamp stuck among various comestibles in the window. Here a middle-aged man, who looked like a "coster," was cursing a woman, seated at the side of the fire, in the choicest Billingsgate. She answered him now and again with a sneer, which only enraged him the more, and seeing us he made a direct appeal out of sheer inability to cope with her tongue. "Look 'ere, she says she'll 'a me pinched (locked up) for kicking, and yet she's broken a plate on my 'ead. She'll be pinched, not me." This was screamed out at the top of his voice with an expletive between every third word, and as he finished he savagely smashed the pieces of the broken plate that were lying on the floor. There was a mark on his forehead, and it was clear that he had been struck with something, and that very recently. We left him literally "breathing vengeance," and we could hear the "row" going long after we were out of sight of the shop.

Several other interiors came under my notice that were of a far superior class, many indeed being as snug as they could be made. Pictures, in more

than one instance, completely covered the walls, leaving scarcely a trace of the paper visible; and in one living-room, where the ceiling was so low that my hat almost touched it, a handsome parrot in a gorgeous cage was quietly roosting. The pictures in these domiciles were a study in themselves, and it would be interesting to trace the causes that led to their purchase. Exciting battle-pieces, stirring scenes by sea and land, are easily accounted for by the strange love for the terrible that is inherent among the lowest and most brutal. Scriptural subjects, saints with the golden glory round their holy brows, the Madonna with her infant child, the Crucifixion and Resurrection, are only what might have been expected in this other dwelling peopled by Roman Catholics; but other pictures are far more puzzling. The portrait of the Prince of Wales, for instance, representing him as a rosy-cheeked young man, with incipient moustache and whiskers, in a military habit, is an especial favourite, and I was continually encountering it. Not a single portrait of Her Most Gracious Majesty, Victoria, did I observe, and yet her eldest son was everywhere visible. Whatever induced these outcasts and offenders against the laws of God and man to adorn their walls with the likeness of England's future king I know not, unless the money was invested to obtain "a good property," for the frames were all of pretty solid construction.

After a chat with Lizzie O'Neill, whose husband, "Big Jack," is "waiting for sessions," and a look into "Johnny the Kid's" house, we dropped into the residence of "Fat Ann," where half a dozen collier-lads from "Wiggin" were "enjoying" themselves. Some rude attempt was being made at a song by a half-drunken girl, but two or three of her companions drowned her voice by their incessant quarrelling. These colliers from a distance are a feature of these haunts on Saturday nights, and I saw at least 50 of them during the evening in various "cribs." They are "cleaned out" of all the money they think fit to spend, and when they refuse to part with more they are occasionally bundled out into the street, a row is created, and any "portable property" they may have on them, in the shape of scarf pins, watches, and loose cash, is quickly transferred to other owners. As a precaution they generally go in threes and fours, and profiting by experience, and, of late, by their improved system of "purring," they can defy any of the "cosherers" (bullies) who may attempt to molest them. Some of these colliers were mere boys, and their stunted growth and the unhealthy look about their shrewd, pale faces, showed the viciousness of their lives. They were all clogged, and not a few had brass tips on the sharp wooden toes that would have told fearfully in an up-and-down fight. They had nothing to recommend them in appearance or speech, and were only one remove above the class they were temporarily associating with.

Fat Ann's neighbour was "Iiza Lanky" (Lanca-



shire), who deserves some little notice. Stepping into her front room direct from the street, I saw a big unwieldy woman sitting on an old sofa with her elbow on the small round table that stood near her. There was a strong smell of whisky pervading the room, and I perceived that her head was bound round with a wet cloth. She threw herself back on the sofa, and the action disclosed her features, which were bloated and swollen, and bore marks of many a brutal blow. She seemed morose and savagely discontented, and a more forbidding face I have seldom seen. The damp bandage over her forehead, with the wet trickling down her temples, only made the thick bushy eyebrows and prominent cheek-bones more striking, and the dishevelled hair and dress completed the picture. A man came in from a back kitchen with another bandage, and the smell of whisky was explained as he told us that "he thowt whisky good for a bad 'ed." She sulkily snarled out that it was, and subsided into her ill-humoured apathy once more. A labouring man with a wooden leg was resting upon another sofa, and it was evident he was a stranger, from the alarmed look he kept casting upon the woman. Who he was and what he wanted in such company, I did not take the trouble to inquire. Leaving Lanky to her novel cure for headache—the outward application of alcohol to counteract its inward effects—we made tracks without further delay.

## CHAPTER V.

## DEANS\_GATE: SCENES ON A SATURDAY NIGHT.

Narrower streets I had seldom been in, and more repulsive men and women I had never beheld than those who jostled us at corners and brushed up against us with the privilege of the vulgar. The rain began to fall slowly but steadily, and shining puddles in the ill-paved roadway gathered quickly as we passed along. Suddenly Mac touched my arm and dived down into what I thought an old cellar, for a wide, arched passage gaped before us. I carefully followed, and after going down three or four steps I was quite in darkness, with the exception of the faint glimmer from a dim street lamp that was reflected from the wet surface of the flags. "Take your hat off," said Mac, "and mind the top." It was fortunate he had spoken so promptly, for I was just raising my head, and I found I could not stand upright. Groping along with blind confidence, I followed one of the walls, which was damp and slimy, and so we passed on for some twenty yards. Almost as suddenly as we had entered this miniature tunnel did we emerge, but it was by a series of steps which led into a back court, with the houses grouped in most irregular disorder. The passage was nothing but a subway beneath the dwellings facing the street, but why such an extraordinary means of communication should have been found necessary I

cannot surmise. It would afford ample means of escape for anyone pursued by strangers, and I am half inclined to believe it had often done good service in that particular direction. In the yard itself flights of steps, guarded by iron handrails, led to some of the doors, and below were the cellars that had once served as dwellings for the poorest and most wretched. We looked into several kitchens, but only found women sitting with strange men of the collier type I have mentioned, singing and indulging in coarse jokes. Passing along a kind of wooden bridge, we traversed another dark entry, and were once more in the open street, though in quite a different direction to the thoroughfare from which we had started.

Dolefield and Willmott-street were now near at hand, and they were next looked up. Men and women were as usual thickly clustered together in the front rooms, and most of the doors were wide open as if inviting the unwary to enter. Once, in the dark, I had got half way upstairs, before finding out that I should have turned to the left to have entered the proper room. I was soon recalled to a sense of my mistake by the appearance, at the top of the stairs, of a woman half undressed, with a ragged petticoat over her head, and a guttering tallow dip in her hand.—She inquired, "Where the — are you goin'?" and I went—down the steps backwards as rapidly as I could. I slipped out into the street, where I found Mac waiting for me. He laughed inordinately when I told him what had happened, and said they always had the stairs opposite the street door for convenience. He added sententiously, "You know they can kick a man down stairs and straight out into the gutter without any trouble, and its very useful sometimes." I had not the slightest doubt of this, for I had observed that the stairs faced directly to the street, but I made an inward vow never to go up any more of them, for the virago in full war paint had rather startled me.

So closely built are these wretched dwellings that on entering Brocky Rose Ann's, in Willmott-street, we could distinguish every word of a song that was being screeched out by a woman in the adjoining corner house in Dolefield. We turned round the corner to find the vocalist, and we had not long to search. In a miserable apartment two feet below the street level, and almost pitch dark, for the paraffin lamp had been so badly trimmed that the glass was jet black with smoke, we discovered this Deansgate nightingale. She was sitting on a rickety stool, with her toes almost under the grate, in spite of the good fire that was half scorching her; and as she turned round defiantly to us it could be seen that she was too drunk to be amenable to the rules of ordinary conversation. Her "man" was standing by her, and an old woman, with a face wrinkled and black with age and dirt, was crouching on her knees to light her pipe with a glowing ember. The songstress had the remnants of some good looks still left her, but it was too plain she was "of the

wicked," and her language proved it. Her song was, singularly enough, a love ditty that I have often heard rendered by street singers, with far less power and effectiveness. She was almost "crooning it," as the Irish would say; and as the words—

And I was in my green grass grave,  
And green grass grew all over me—

came softly forth, for the girl had a voice of fair compass, the old woman mumbled and nodded, and her pipe shook in her lips, as she looked admiringly at her companion. The room was almost devoid of furniture, and the dirty plaster walls, innocent of paint or paper, formed a fitting frame for the picture. The place was stifling, and the stench from the lamp-oil and from other sources was sickening. We left them to their music, and stepped out once more into the rain.

It was a dreary walk, and we were glad to take refuge in an entry to escape the drizzling downpour. We had only been standing beneath the sheltering arch a few minutes, when we heard a "row" in the yard, and we, of course, hastened up to see what was the cause of the disturbance. It was nothing; for Bradley's-court, Wood-street, had often seen a drunken woman behaving like a mad creature, and "Spinks's gal" was now only raving at the top of her voice, for the police had been round, and their presence had reminded her of poor "Bill" who was, I think, doing a stretch. The door of the room in which she lived was open, and through the smoke that filled the place we could see her gesticulating in the wildest fury. Two or three neighbours tried to calm her but without avail, for she would not be appeased. On the low iron fender a child of seven or eight years of age was sitting, but in such a state of dirt, blackened and begrimed with smoke and other impurities, that his features were scarcely distinguishable. He was a mere pigmy of a lad, and yet he remained quiet and never uttered a cry while the woman was so noisily demonstrative. He seemed not the slightest alarmed, and gazed now into the fire and then at the persons in the doorway with no interest at all expressed in his face. He had been used to this sort of thing, I supposed, from his earliest years, and took it as a matter of course. No doubt his training will have good effects in after life.

After hearing sufficient vile expressions to last an ordinary being for the term of his natural life we betook ourselves to the street again, but it was only an escape from Scylla to fall into Charybdis, for we soon perceived that a battle-royal was being carried on between two women who were involved in a hopeless struggle to remove the hair from each other's heads. They were watched by an appreciative circle of friends, male and female, who now and again quarrelled among themselves to bear the combatants company. The result was what might have been expected, the commencement of a free fight; but it was soon

put a stop to by the appearance on the scene of a man who I could see at once had more power over these unruly mobs than they would like to confess. He was of average build, but broadly set, and he "went for" the crowd instantly with a quiet determination that was in keeping with what followed. He had no stick or anything to protect himself, but he parted the woman, thrust one among the crowd, and gripping the arm of the other, pushed her into one of the houses. Then, turning to the men who were still quarrelling, he sharply spoke to them by name and told them to "be off." One who had been engaged in the fight called out, menacingly "All right, you — Jerome," but before he could say more he was seized by the collar, run barrow-fashion down the street, shoved into his own residence, and told to remain inside. To ensure compliance with his orders, this man of prompt and energetic action pulled the door smartly to and ordered the few stragglers to disperse. They tailed off in various directions without further disturbance, and the street was as quiet as before. The whole affair had transpired so rapidly that I could scarce believe my senses when I saw a crowd of apparently the lowest ruffians of Wood-street slinking off, cowed by a single man. This proves how well order can be preserved by a good detective officer who knows his work thoroughly and does it without fear or favour. There are several men of the kind in our local force, and their names are more powerful in the "dangerous" districts than the presence of any number of men in uniform.

After this little scene we continued our excursion and we found many evidences that the *élite* of the district were spending Saturday night in the most approved English fashion—that is to say, they were recklessly getting rid of all their spare cash, and receiving in return various forms of drink. Song and dance were added to give piquancy to the amusement, for in one house the inevitable hurdy-gurdy was grinding forth a lively tune, while a man in shirt sleeves danced a hornpipe with spirit and energy. To see the pleasure with which the limited audience watched his uncouth motions one would have imagined he was best man in the district at a "break-down," but I have seen many a lad at a street corner, doing a double-shuffle to warm his clogged feet, who could have beaten him with ease. The songs were of a very diverse character, for in one place,—a respectable house by the way, though in a disreputable neighbourhood—a strong well-built fellow was quavering out "On the banks of the Nile," while mending a dilapidated waistcoat. He was a tailor, but his physique was that of a navvy, and it was strange to observe his huge hand plying the needle so dexterously. He was as bashful, while singing, as a girl, and as the chorus was taken up by five or six men as powerful looking as himself he seemed wonderfully relieved to find his own voice drowned. He was loudly applauded at the finish, and was as pleased as the greatest tenor that



ever responded to an encore. Very different in sentiment and character was another effusion, a verse of which is worth appending for its originality. It was howled forth, in a shrill treble, by a youth who might have been the hero of the song itself. As near as I can recollect it ran thus:—

Oh I'm a bloke what gets my livin',  
By taking things what isn't given  
With my hand, with my fist,  
With my juke, with my mauler.  
I wish there was no bobbies!  
I do! I do!  
For the treadmill  
It does make me ill;  
And I only steals, my belly to fill,  
With my hand, with my fist,  
With my juke, with my mauler.  
(Chorus) Oh downy on the blue 'uns!

## CHAPTER VI.

### GAMBLING AND PRIZE FIGHTING.

The Deansgate district is such an extensive one that I found it impossible to perambulate all its "by-paths and indirect crook'd ways" in the course of a single evening, and thus my steps were led to it a second Saturday night. Passing into Back Dolefield we looked into Thornley's "crib," as disreputable as any in the city, and I had the pleasure of seeing the veteran, a genuine "Eccles," with a face that would rival Bardolph's, reclining on the sofa with a couple of old women to bear him company. He had made his own room tolerably comfortable, and there was the usual display of cheap and gaudy ornamentation. Lord Palmerston's jolly face looked straight into mine, and the well-known features of the popular actor, Mr. J. L. Toole, came also under my direct gaze. It may be that the celebrated comedian never imagined he would come so "low" as this, but he must be willing to pay for his popularity in more ways than one. We also beat up the quarters of Doggy Duff, but he was unfortunately out, and the only occupant of his "diggings" was a girl who was half asleep on a couch. Doggy is rather a slippery customer, Mac told me, and is so careless about his supervision that he occasionally gets into trouble through his memory playing him false in the matter of reporting himself to the "slops."

After a little further investigation of the neighbourhood of Cumberland-street, where I was glad to learn much had been done by the owners of recently erected factories in purchasing of a good deal of cottage property and letting it only to working people, who, as Mac put it, were "poor but square," we turned into Byrom-street. Facing the Field, at the end further from Quay-street, was a narrow entry sloping at an angle of some 30°, and this was the route which led us into Butterworth's Court, and to the residence of Country Poll, a woman of middle age, and with a vacancy in her face, caused by the loss of an eye, which had

been kicked out by her pal, "Puffer Bill." She was gossiping with a couple of women of the same stamp as herself, and one of these had a large piece of sticking-plaster over her forehead, as if her particular "Bill" had been attempting a similar experiment to that made in the case of the landlady. They were surly enough to have satisfied Mark Tapley himself, and on our gently inquiring for Puffer we were told with an oath that he hadn't been there for some months, "and good shut to him." I very much questioned whether Puffer's "heart was true to Poll" still, but fearful of provoking the wrath of that bird of prey, I refrained from gratifying my curiosity. Close to this place was a similar establishment, the occupier of which had done a "drag" (three months' imprisonment), but had thrown up "cross-work" for the more lucrative profession of betting, in which he had been "nabbed" and "put-in" for the modest sum of £75, which was devoted to Her Majesty's service.

There were many working people living in the same court, but the proximity of these questionable houses must have a bad effect, and in one "square" house we saw that this was so, for a girl of 18 years of age was lying dead-drunk across two chairs. Her feet touched the ground at one end of this hard bed, and her head was hanging down, with her hair streaming on to the bricks, at the other. Several women were in the same place with two or three children, but they took the whole business as a matter of course, and went on with their supper as if drunkenness was nothing more than an every-day occurrence, as I suppose it really was. The children had a good example set them certainly by the scene. There was a dirty bed with tumbled clothes near the fire-place, and it was used in place of chairs by several of those present. Living and bed-room all in one is the best description, and the details can be readily sketched in. Such an arrangement is by no means uncommon, for in another court, in the Spinningfield vicinity, I had before seen a large bed occupying half the living-room, and coming flush with the fire-place. On that bed two children were sleeping, undressed and with the blankets pulled over them, and upon the same couch two men and a woman were sitting, with their feet on the fender, making their midnight meal. The children turned uneasily in their sleep, and the dirty brown bedclothes, redolent of humanity—the odour is so peculiar I cannot otherwise convey my meaning—were tossed about in all directions. How many creatures slept nightly in that bed I shuddered to think, but use is second nature, and no doubt they had become inured to any little disagreeable incident that might arise.

In Little Quay-street the class of persons also appeared to be of the lowest of the hard-working population, and in some of the courts the scanty furniture and the squalid appearance of the kitchens showed how hard was the struggle for existence. Being Saturday night many of the women were

washing linen for the Sabbath, and across the rooms were stretched clothes-lines, on which ragged shirts and well-worn underclothing were slowly drying. We made our way into one of the houses, and hearing voices at the end of the passage we went forward, and came upon eight or nine lads gambling in the back washing-house. They were gathered round a small barrel, in a hole in which was stuck a candle, and for a minute or so we watched them without being perceived. The youngest was about twelve years old, and the ages of the others would not exceed fifteen or sixteen, and yet they were gambling with all the eagerness of most accomplished and inveterate gamblers. The game was termed by them "speaking," or "spin-halfpenny," and is a very simple one. A member of the circle puts his coin down in the centre, covering it with his hand, and the others "fly" their coins and "speak" in turn. Those who guess rightly receive a halfpenny from the centre-man; those who are wrong pay him a similar amount. Suddenly, a youth who had exhibited the true gambler's instinct in showing "heads" every time, caught sight of us, and seeing strange faces, he gave the alarm; the barrel was kicked over, the candle "dowsed," and the juvenile *roués* were scampering off in the dark. They fell pell-mell over each other in getting to the back-door, colliding with the barrel, which rolled towards us, and in another minute the clatter of small clogs resounded in the back entry, which led into another street. We were greatly amused at witnessing the stampede, for it was plain that they suspected we were going forcibly to interfere with their amusement. "Only fancy," laughed Mac, "the kids took us for the 'blues' (police). The idea was certainly a ludicrous one. We were by this time in Quay-street itself, and in passing along we called at a lodging-house, in which were two shady characters playing at draughts, and a third acting the part of critic and spectator. It was a dull place, and had no noticeable features worthy of remark. It had, however, once been a beerhouse, and under the title of the "Red, White, and Blue," had been notorious all over the country. It has suffered disestablishment, like many of its brethren, and Fame no longer records its glories.

The last place we visited on the Wood-street side of Deansgate was a large rambling corner house at the junction of Tickle and Longworth streets, kept by a notable dog-fancier and exponent of the Noble Art, which is dying out with the suppression of the P.R. It is a house with a history, and the back kitchen could tell many a tale of battles fought and won within its narrow precincts. This kitchen is only some ten feet square, and a sofa runs along one side, and a wooden seat along the two other walls, while the fireplace occupies the fourth side. The ceiling is not very high, and a wooden beam near the door makes it appear still lower. From this beam stretches a small gas bracket, which gives light to the apartment. I had heard of some famous ancient

rendezvous of the stars of the Ring in bygone days, and I questioned Mac, who I knew was one of the prettiest men with the gloves that ever stepped inside the ropes. "Why, you've no idea, sir," Mac volubly commenced, "of what's taken place here years ago. Many a smart lad has toed the mark here (pointing to the middle of the brick floor), and some of the best in the country have been licked by th' old 'uns. I've seen it myself when kitchen's been full up, and all on us had to stand on the sofa and benches, all round, ye see, off the floor, for we had no ring. One second was down there (in the corner of the fireplace), and the other in the opposite corner. It was sharp and quick, for there was no funk'n' or gettin' away except into the fire-place. It was all up-and-down, rough-and-tumble, and beautiful slogging work it was, too. You can't get anythin' like it now; they've stopped it altogether. Been one lately, did you say? Well, about two years ago Tabby Edwards and Brocky Bill had a set-to for a couple o' quid (£2) a-side. It wasn't bad, but they were both lushed (drunk) before they began, and they got cut-up heavily. Yes, Tabby won, though he'd got the gravel-rash (cut face) from the bricks there when he was down. There, upstairs, was a regular ring, stakes, ropes, and all, in the top room, a big place, and some of the spriest men with the gloves have stripped up there that I've ever seen. Many a big benefit has been brought off when Young Cheer and Wareham's lot were about. It was kept by a pro (fighting-man) then, but it's all U.P. now."

The story seemed incredible, for the house is not fifty yards from Deansgate itself, but the truth is too well known to many to require corroboration. I was not sorry to hear that it was at an end, though I could sympathise with the old pugilist in his keen regret that the present age was so degenerate as scarcely to recognise the necessity of legitimate boxing being one of the first attainments of our youth. I met several fighting men, but they all agreed that the Ring is now quite out of date, and even glove fights are looked after by the police as much as the genuine battles used to be. One big hulking fellow, with a face as hard as wood, and cut and scarred all over, "wherein deep dints of old wounds did remain," was particularly indignant. "What's a man like me to do?" he asked. "I was trained up to it and made heaps of thick-'uns (sovereigns) whenever I fowt, and I didn't care a kiss-my-hand for a thrashin', for I was nussed like a kid. I've stripped one day and got a smasher on my ribs and spiked thro' foot, but I never let on (told his second.) The peelers drove us off and I went at it again next day and licked my man, though my ribs had gone stiff. Then you could do something without being made a fuss about in papers, but now I only go round to gaffs (fairs) and sparr with one or two dummies for a trifle. That won't keep me, and what can I do but go crooked? If I put a bloke up



(garotte a man) can you blame me?" I didn't think it worth while to preach morality to this untutored savage, so, standing him a soothing drink, I left him to his meditations. Having finished the Wood-street district, we crossed over and commenced an inspection of the Peter-street side of Deansgate.

## CHAPTER VII.

### WOMEN AND THEIR MASTERS.

The Peter-street side of Deansgate once shared with the Wood-street neighbourhood the questionable notoriety of being the most dangerous district in the city; but of late years a determined course of action has been pursued by the police which has resulted in thinning to a very large extent the ranks of the worst offenders. The beerhouses in which nightly assembled lawless characters of the worst type have one by one been deprived of their licences, and they now do duty as lodging-houses, the large open rooms being peculiarly adapted for affording sleeping accommodation to persons who are not particularly fastidious as to the nature of the couch they occupy. Entering one of these places in Jackson's Row, we marched along a passage and came upon what had been the old tap-room, a long, low room with benches and rough wooden tables, at which a few men, of dirty and unkempt aspect, were sitting smoking short pipes. They had to all intents and purposes nothing to occupy themselves with, not even cards or dominoes, but they listened to a mechanical organ near the door that was grinding out a lively melody at the top of its pitch. The room was fairly comfortable, and if its occupants were rather uncivilised in appearance, and had as much dirt as shirt to their backs, none of them were of so low a cast as the Charter-street or Wood-street roughs. Men of the order who have been convicted, and wish to work for a living in preference to resorting to their old practices, often locate themselves on this side of Deansgate instead of joining their friends "over the way." Hence it may be argued that the pick of the timid and irresolute congregate on one side of this populous street, and thoroughgoing thieves on the other.

Bootle-street and Lad-lane were taken next, but in the matter of meeting people of notoriety we were singularly unfortunate. Mac tried house after house to see if he could come across any "pals," but he was disgusted on discovering that the old order had changed, "giving place to the new," and that where, years ago, he could have fraternised with a dozen cross-men, he had now only the dubious pleasure of greeting square-folk. These were poor enough certainly, and their abodes were far from being attractive, for squalor and misery reigned supreme in many of them. There was a lack of cleanliness and comfort in the interior of the houses that was very shocking, but this was perhaps only the

natural result of people living and sleeping in the same small room. In one house three women were crouching in the dark round a fire, the blaze from which alone afforded light to guide us, and one of them was sobbing bitterly. We thought at first she was crying on account of a child she was holding to her breast, and who looked sick unto death; but we rapidly found out our mistake. She was not lamenting her own trials, but those of her sister, a fine handsome woman, but whose features were for the time so fearfully bruised that I could scarcely trace their outline. Both eyes were blackened and almost closed, her cheek was cut and discoloured, her lips bleeding and swollen, and in her hair were traces of blood, as if she had been beaten on the head. She must have been suffering great physical pain, but she never spoke a word, only drawing her shawl closer over her head, and sinking down nearer to the fire as if seeking comfort. In answer to our questions the woman with the child soon explained the matter. Her sister was living with a man, as his wife, and because she would not go out into the streets he had struck and kicked her until she had escaped from her own house to the one she was now in. The woman herself told us "He'd done it afore, but she would never go out at nights for all his cruelty. He could kill her if he liked, but she wouldn't do it." Why didn't she tell the police? Because she wasn't goin' to round (inform) on him for it. He'd done a stretch (year) once for garottin', and she didn't want him to be sent away again. Yes, he was all right when he hadn't got the drink in him. He'd be sorry to-morrow and she should go back again." It was only after a great deal of skilful questioning that we managed to elicit this information, and I marvelled at the forbearance of the woman who could return to a man who had first of all attempted to degrade her, and then half killed her because she chose to be faithful to him.

"I know him," said Mac, "and a full bad 'un he is too, especially to women. He's always living with some girl he has got hold of, and when he's tired of one he just thrashes her till she'll go on the street, and then, if she won't give him money, he finds some one else. Why, once he met a servant girl, made her drunk and drugged her in one of the cribs, abused her as much as he liked, and then stole the only two quids (sovereigns) she'd got in the world. She'd come to town to look for a shop, and had sewed her money in her stays, but he ripped them up and got the sovs. Did he clear out after it? Not a bit, he was booked by one of the d's (detectives) and did a double stretch (two years) for it at sessions. He's no worse than many of 'em, only he never cares who he drops-on." I fervently hoped that "many of 'em" would not cross our path, for it was unpleasant to feel that a ruffian of this breed might take it into his brutal head to "drop-on" one of us. The estimate of women in these quarters is a very low one, for inquiry proved that they are kicked and ill-treated as

a matter of course, and where they are not the professional companions of thieves they are something worse. We visited several more houses in Back Lad-lane and Back Allport, and I was shown the "runs" and means of escape from one street to another. The place is almost like a rabbit warren, for each entry leads into another, and each court abuts on its neighbour in the most inexplicable way. In addition to this, there are means of through communication from the lodging-houses, and such a labyrinth of passages that any stranger must inevitably come to grief if once involved in the maze. Fustian-cutters, and other poverty-stricken workers, live in these courts, and if these articles were dealing with other than true criminals some curious information could be given as to the mode of life and experiences of these unfortunate creatures. As "poverty is no sin," however, it would be unfair to expose their misfortunes in such bad company as we are now associating with.

In Gregson-street we wandered into another large lodging-house, which had once been a beerhouse, and what struck me most in this bare and comfortless tenement was a printed notice stuck up requiring payment in advance. There were a few men having supper in different parts of the front room, one discussing a rasher of ham and a bowl of tea, and another cooking a red herring in a very summary manner. He pushed the fish between the bars after it had sputtered and blazed on the coals, took it out with a pocket-knife which he thrust right through the middle, and placed it smoking on his plate. Two or three live embers adhered to the sides, but he picked them off with his hands, licked his fingers to get rid of the superfluous oil, and then calmly dissected the dainty morsel with his most useful knife. In an inner room unusual luxuries were provided in the shape of a bit of looking-glass, about two inches square, nailed to the wall, and an inch of dirty comb suspended by a string from a hook. How many thousand dirty heads that wreck of a comb had done duty upon, it would be difficult to say, but there it hung, in silent sorrow, doubtless bewailing the loss of its teeth through extreme age. In a second and smaller house two youths were lying on a bench about six feet long by eighteen inches wide. Each lay lengthways with his head upon the other's feet, and the lads had crept so close together for the sake of warmth that it was hard to distinguish to which body the various limbs belonged. They slept as soundly on their hard bed as if comfortably between the sheets, and afforded a good example of the impartiality of "tired Nature's sweet restorer." In a third dwelling, a stout red-faced man with clean-shaven cheeks and bullet head, on which the hair was scarcely half an inch long, snored on a small form, his head thrown back and supported by the wall. This was the redoubtable Fat Alick, but he was awfully savage at being shaken up by Mac and would not keep his eyes open, but swore with them

shut in a manner to alarm anyone unaccustomed to the general literature of blasphemy. "He has been cut up about the loss of his woman," explains Mac. "She is doing a seven-stretch now, and only began it in summer. She was fly enough to keep 'em both, and now he has to do as best he can without her." No wonder this pensioner on a woman's abilities was cast down at the way in which he had been served by "luck."

Dyers'-lane and Fleet-street were the next on my list, and here again I found many traditions; but the 'good old days' had passed, and instead of ruffianism being rampant, the stern, self-assertive power of the criminal law is in the ascendant, and comparatively few desperate characters can be found. The lodging-houses and general dwellings are on a par with those in Lad-lane and Gregson-street, but many of them have a history which would startle the staid residents in busy Deansgate if the walls could only speak. One of the best things that has happened for the neighbourhood is the pulling down of the poor cottage property at the rear of these streets, to make way for the new Midland Railway, and the effect will soon make itself apparent in the disappearance of the disreputable and immoral men and women that have so long haunted Windmill-street and Peter-street. The good work the police began has been completed by the railway company, and the peaceful law-abiding working people who are compelled to hang-out in these "marked" quarters should be thankful that though they may still be under the ban of poverty they have no longer the degrading association of thieves to poison their lives.

Something of this kind crossed my mind as we were going up Fleet-street, and saw stretching before us the drear vacant space, eloquent, in its desolation, of modern improvement and civilising influences, that was so soon to be covered with the turmoil and life of a great railway station. While in one of the back kitchens Mac, who had grown more and more downcast at meeting none of his old friends, suddenly found his tongue and gave me the benefit of one of his experiences: "There was a man lived here once," he said, "who was about the worst I ever fell across, and he did a trick which you perhaps won't believe. He'd three daughters, and two of 'em had gone to the bad but still lived with him, as he took all the money they could get. The third was as fine a gal as ever came out of Fleet-street, but she was a cut above her lot, and wouldn't have any patter with the men who came to the house. One night the old man was drunk and sold her to one of the fellows who had been drinking with him—at least he took half-a-dollar (half-a-crown) from him, and said he could take the girl altogether and do what he liked with her. Well, she was called in from a pub (beerhouse) over the way, and the man got hold of her and insulted her. She fought like a cat to get away, but he was too strong, and they rolled over and over on the floor, the father



and a lot of fellows looking on and enjoying the fun. I came just in time to see the finish, for in the struggle a shovel that was stuck in the fire, and was red hot, caught in the girl's dress and was dragged across the bricks. She was frightened of being set on fire, and threw the brute off her. He fell with his hands across that shovel, and was burnt pretty smart, for he couldn't touch a thing with his fingers for weeks. Yes, she got away that time, but she went like her sisters, though I think she's married now." Before leaving I was shown No. 11, now a decent lodging-house, but once a den of fearful notoriety, and the central place of meeting of hundreds of the most unscrupulous "crooked" men in England.

#### CHAPTER VIII.

### A DOG FIGHT: BRUTALITY AND POVERTY.

We were working down Deansgate, in order to arrive at the Gaythorn district, and while, in Lombard-street, had a somewhat narrow escape from a vicious bulldog that was ensconced under a sofa in one of the houses we looked into. He would have exercised his talents upon our calves in a very short space of time, had he not been kicked into a corner by his master. I was half afraid of the brute making a second attempt upon the unprotected lower-man, but he contented himself with growls and snarls, not loud but deep, and hissonorous chest-notes furnished a bass accompaniment to our conversation. He was "full of years," but still had the indomitable pluck of his race, and I learned that he was the hero of at least a hundred fights. Mac knew him and his master well, and over a social pipe he narrated some of his experiences in the matter of dog-fights in the Deansgate locality. Seeing that we were his master's friends, the surly "bull" came into the circle we had formed round the fire and stretched himself across the hearth, but whenever I moved he admonished me by a smothered bark, strangled in his throat, to remain still and not destroy the effect of the story.

"It was a thing that was all the go at one time," said Mac, "and every booze-shop (beerhouse) in Wood-street and Spinningfield used to have their garrets fitted up for dog-fights regular every week. It was known well enough when a match was coming off, and we used to get many a "swell" in who didn't mind paying for it. It was always at the top of the house that we brought the fight off, and at night, when there was plenty of row in the street to prevent any noise bein' heard. Not from the dogs, they had too much to do with each other to kick up any shine, but occasionally the backers would go half mad, excited like, and would scream and hoot to keep up their partic'lar favourite. One night we had a gathering at the "Ship," for Cockney Charley had got a pup he swore couldn't

be licked, and a Wiggin (Wigan) bloke had matched an old 'un against it for a fiver (£5 note). It was a big do, and there were forty or fifty of us packed in garret, and coin was laid freely, for both dogs were clippers. Just before they were loosed, Cockney Charley offered long odds on his pup; and, to rile him, some of us said we wouldn't rob him for we knew his animal would be fair beaten. He was so savage that he cried out "By —, if pup lose, I'll smash it;" but we never thought he would. Well, fight went on, and the youngster had the best of it for a bit, but the Wiggin 'un was too much for it at finish, and in last set-to left it on floor half-dead. The pup was bitten frightful on head and shoulders, but might have got over it. Cockney Charley was as good as his word; for he went out, tried pup with another dog, and, 'cause it was licked, jumped on his favourite, and it went dead soon after." I inquired if anything of the kind could be seen now, but Mac said it had been all over now for years, as the houses had been closed where it was carried on. Men like Cockney Charley can no longer enjoy their amusement. The action of the police in disestablishing these low drinking shops has evidently done good in more ways than one.

We struck down Deansgate itself after leaving Lombard-street, and after a few minutes' walk we turned into Gaythorn-street, which gives the name to a thickly-populated district bounded on the one side by a blank wall which fences off the canal and runs from Deansgate right through to Albion-street; and, on the other, by the railway arches which extend along Hewitt-street and several of which have been converted into dwelling-houses, a cowshed, a coal depôt, &c. I was told beforehand that I should meet with few actual thieves in this quarter of the city, in spite of the fact that it was once as notorious as the Street, and I found that my information was correct. Criminals have been cleared out, and in this place resides a population, rough and turbulent truly, but honest so far as their lives are known. They are as completely poverty-stricken as any of the poorest among us, and their abodes are as a rule without comfort or any of the little home luxuries that the hard-working classes can sometimes afford to indulge in. They are a quarrelsome race, too, and yet so clannish that when a street row takes place the police have always a difficult task to restore peace, much less to arrest the leading spirits. It would scarcely be an exaggeration to say that more assaults upon men in uniform are reported from the Gaythorn streets than any other single quarter. It is like putting one's hand into a bag of snakes to draw out an eel, for a constable to take into custody the leader of one of the drunken broils that are of so frequent occurrence here.

I had only the address of one celebrity in this new field, and that was Aunty Mary, who was said to be keeping a disorderly house in Abraham's-court, Gilbert-street. To the court we repaired, but,

upon entering the house where I had understood she could be found, we discovered that our bird had flown a few days before. Two decent-looking women peered at us suspiciously over the solitary candle on the table, and told us that Aunty's "carryings on" had given such offence to the neighbours that a complaint had been lodged, and after receiving a gentle admonition from the police she had deemed it best to "flit." The women were eager to unfold a tale of Aunty's wrong-doings, and with a volubility that only the love of scandal could have created, poured forth how she had been sent to prison for bad conduct when living near Campfield Library; how she had no business to have come into the court at all; in short, how wicked she was in all her doings. I was sorry I could not meet Aunty, as I was in hopes of gaining some valuable knowledge from her as to the haunts of the few friends she had in Gaythorn, but, being disappointed in this, I asked Mac to guide me through the worst streets "on spec," to see what was the character of the inhabitants, and if, as report stated, there were any cellar-dwellings still in existence.

Our first place of call was a huxter's shop in Commercial-street, but we were most positively assured that they were all "workers" who lived in the adjoining streets, and, if poor, were honest. This was unsatisfactory from one point of view, as my object was crime and not poverty; but having no choice I thought I would for once sacrifice Barabbas for Lazarus, and give up my search for the thief for the sake of his brother the poor man. Before leaving the shop I had gained an insight into the mysteries of Gaythorne book-keeping, for on the black-leaded mantel-piece were chalked a number of hieroglyphics as puzzling to the outsider and to the uninitiated as the characters on the Moabite Stone itself. Cyphers and crosses were abundant, but few plain figures could I see; rows of cyphers straggled across the bricks, colliding with others that had wandered from their proper course, and struggling with the crosses which seemed to have been dropped about wherever the fancy of this artist in chalk had willed. And yet, as Mac sagely whispered, "Every nowt means something," and many a weary housekeeper must have looked with dismay at seeing the little white circles increasing day by day. I counted fifteen in one row, and wondered who the unfortunate victim was who had thus rashly run into debt. The scent of onions, bloaters, sour butter, and pickles was too powerful to allow me to solve the problem, or of discovering the value of  $x$ , that unknown quantity, and we departed at once.

We passed from Jordan-street to Mount-street, and in the latter thoroughfare we found cellar dwellings still in vogue. Down about half a score of steps we picked our way into a kind of area, with small arches, formed by the steps leading from the foot-path to the houses over head, causing us to stoop every other minute. Lights shone from crevices in the window shutters, and at last we entered

one cellar wherein we could hear voices. It was like stepping into an oven, for the confined air was superheated by a large fire in an extensive grate in the right-hand wall, and apparently there were no means of ventilation. A man, who, to judge from his clothes and blackened face, was an engineer, was talking to his wife, and a child was sitting near them. The walls were bare and damp-looking, and the ceiling, brown with smoke and dust, was so low that my hat almost touched it. A small table and a few chairs, with a low, uninviting bed, constituted the furniture; and it was the old story of living and sleeping in the same room, and that some eight feet below the street level. It was close and uncomfortable enough for October, but what it would be in cold weather, when every chink and cranny would be carefully stopped to keep out the cold, fresh air, I should not like to say.

Coming up again to the street level we turned into an entry, and were soon in a small yard with two-storey cottage tenements of the meanest kind. At the door of one of these an urchin of tender years was standing in a state of nakedness, bar the dozen square inches of dirty calico that served him as a tunic. His little body was kept warm with a thin coat of dirt, of a tint between black and brown, that covered him from top to toe with admirable impartiality. We could only catch a glimpse of the kitchen, for there was no light, but the prospect did not tempt me to enter. In the corner of the yard, to the left, was a small house that seemed to have been built to fill in the space, and for no other reason, for there was really no room for it properly in the yard. The flickering of a flame from the fire shot across the window, and looking in we saw a child seated on the hearthstone warming himself and watching the blaze as it leaped fitfully up the chimney. As I opened the door another lad came down with a candle, and we could then note how wretched was this apology for a dwelling. The plastered walls were honeycombed with holes, and the dirt and smoke of years encrusted them. There were three small tables and two chairs in the place, and so small was the room that these alone almost filled it. Noticing a bundle in the corner, I asked one of the lads if it was a bed, and he answered: "Yes; father sleeps there, and mother and us upstairs." More complete poverty I had never beheld, and yet the parents were not drunken or improvident, for the children said they were then away at a tectotal meeting. This house I found to be typical of many more, for in one the door could not be opened more than a foot, as it came in contact with the poles of the bed, across which a thin veil was hung to prevent ought being seen from outside; and in another, two children, both very ill, were sleeping on a sofa, while the mother herself sat upon the bed, waiting till her husband should come in for the night.

Along Cheetham-street, with the railway viaduct frowning down on us, we proceeded: and thence into



Back Smith-street, with its disused cellar-dwellings, with areas six or eight feet wide and deep, guarded with strong iron railings and with long narrow bridges leading to the adjoining houses. As queer a place to look at as any in Manchester, for it is unique in construction, and has almost the appearance of a skeleton stockade. An old Irishwoman does woodcutting in one of the cellars, and we literally "dropped in" upon her, and had a chat. She had not much to say, and was rather frightened, so we took our leave pretty quickly. I had had enough of Poverty by this time, and we finished our ramble by walking up Gaythorn-street and calling in at No. 50, once a fearful den under the reign of Fat Helen (away in servitude), but now occupied by honest tenants. Half the houses have been turned into workshops, and every haunt of "crooked" persons done away with.

#### CHAPTER IX.

### UNDER THE LASH: A GAROTTER'S CONFESSION.

By a singular chance I have been able to meet with a man who has been under the lash for a garotte robbery, and who has recently returned from the term of penal servitude which followed the infliction of the "cat." This will serve to indicate that it is some time since he underwent the severe sentence passed upon him; but I may state that the offence for which he was convicted was committed in Wood-street, and that the actual "scratching" took place in the County Gaol, Strangeways. As the man, since his return, is earning his living honestly, and as it can serve no purpose to give his name, address, or present occupation, I shall refrain from entering into such details. His story was told under circumstances which did away with any inducement to exaggerate or give a false account of the whole business; and I pledge myself to detail, as far as possible in his own words, the history of what has been, to him, the greatest trial in his life. He is still comparatively young, and on meeting him I was surprised to find that he was like the brutal beings who are believed to be the terrors of our dark nights and darker by-paths as little as a gaol is like a church. He speaks fluently, and, as a rule, correctly, though his speech is, of course, considerably embellished with the "slang patter," which is almost a second language to him. Slim of build, and rather below the average height, he possesses apparently none of the strength or nerve that should mark a thief who has to pursue the most hazardous line in his profession; but still there is a determination in his face which goes far to prove that he would not be easily daunted in any enterprise he might undertake. The face is an intelligent one, with quick, uneasy eyes, but the features are clean cut, and there is nothing sensual in them, the forehead, particularly, being good. So much for his general appearance,

which is far from being unprepossessing. The following is his narrative:—

"Some years ago I'd been working all round Scotland with the gaffs (fairs, &c.), and had done well at breech-buzzing (pocket-picking) at most of the towns from Dumfries to Aberdeen. I was with a good mob (gang), and we lifted many a book (pocket-book) without once being put in. At Aberdeen I heard my mother was ill, and I came straight away down here; and as I'd done so well I thought I'd throw up crooked-work, marry a certain party, and settle down. I meant to do it, but I got in a row in Wood-street, and I was lagged for what I'd never done. It was a put-up job, for I never screwed (garotted) the man who was robbed, and at the 'sizes I fancied I must get clean off. I was surprised when the jury found me guilty, and then I knew I was in for something hot, for I'd done a drag (three months), and four years, besides two or three six months'. I never expected to hear what I did, and when the judge said I was to get a seven-stretch (seven years' penal servitude) and two dozen lashes, I funk'd it, I can tell you. It knocked me over completely, and I scarcely knew what to think about. I was awfully wild, for I considered I didn't deserve such a severe sentence for what I'd never done; but it must come off I knew. I was in for it proper, and I made up my mind to bear all and say nothing. I was sentenced on the Monday, and it was not till the next Tuesday but one that I was told I should have my 'bashing' (flogging). I was in a state all the days I was in the cells thinking on what I should get. If it had come straight off I shouldn't have minded, but it was thinking over it. I kept trying to feel what the strokes of the lash would be like whether it would hurt me very much after the first half-dozen; but I could never get past one point, and that was that it would be — smart. If any-one had come and told me I could get off by having another five-stretch put on the seven I should have jumped at it. Not a word of a lie I'm telling, for I was safe I should catch it warm, and I'd heard that the strongest men couldn't stand it. I was always weak, though I'd nothing the matter with me any time, and I was sure it'd kill me out and out. I felt as certain of that as anything, and I couldn't sleep a bit. Waiting for it's what settles you; but at last one morning I was told I was to be scrat.

"I was led from cell into the yard and stripped to my trousers. It was as cold as could be, for it was in December, and I shivered and felt just as bad as ever I did in my life. I was taken to a wall and saw two rings in the bricks about as high as my shoulders and two posts of wood, standing a bit apart and away from the rings, with a cross piece that seemed as if it could slide up and down. At the bottom of the posts was a kind of box with two round holes in the top. They opened this like you might pull a drawer out of a cupboard, and I was made to stand

n it. My feet were fitted into the corners, and then they closed it and screwed it up. My legs were just fixed in the holes now up to over the knee, and I was as fast as in a vice. My hands were put into the rings and the cross-piece of wood fitted across my chest by the doctor. I was as tight as a drum, and my back was a little bent and forced out and my arms stretched full length. I couldn't bend my knees or shift about in any way, for everything was fixed up so as to keep me in that same state till I'd got my dose. There was something wanting at first, so after I'd been tied up some minutes I was half frozen; and they undid me and put something over my shoulders. My back was stiff with cold even in that time, and I had to wait a bit longer. It was — cruel, for I like suffered twice, but at last they put me up again. One of the screws (turnkeys) had got the cat in his hand, and he was a big fellow, but not half a bad 'un. He said to me he hoped I shouldn't think any worse of him for it, but if he didn't do it some 'un else would. Of course it was his duty, but he did lay it on. The doctor stood by with his chronometer in his hand counting—I'm sure it was a chronometer, for I'd handled many a one in my time—and then I got my bashing.

"The first stroke went right across my shoulders, and it was something awful. I'd never felt anything like it before, and I howled out sharp, and roared as loud as I could. Just where the lash went it seemed to burn right into me, and the skin felt as if it had swelled up and was going to burst. It went through me like, and if a hot iron had scorched me it wouldn't have been half as sharp. I'd been told by the old 'uns in the gaol that it was best to shout, as the doctor would think it was hurting me bad, and I might get off with half the dose, and I kept on all the time it lasted. I could have said to the doctor, 'You — pig' as quiet as I'm saying it to you now, for crying didn't ease me a bit. It was only a bit of kidment (deception) to 'scheme' the doctor, but it didn't work. It was slow time, for I counted thirty before I got number two, and that came as sharp as the first. I cursed and called them every — thing I could get off my tongue, for I felt savage at being shoved in for what I didn't deserve. The doctor stood close by, and pointed out where every stroke was to drop, and the screw put it down just where he shewed. He was a bad 'un, that doctor, for every cut was as bad as the others, and the pain was just like dying over and over again. What did I think of between the lashes? I don't know, for I was cursing as hard as I could. You see, I did think I'd done many times things that I ought to have got a lashing for, but now I was innocent. I couldn't help that coming into my head during the half minute between the lashes, but the hardest pull was trying to make out where the next would drop. The doctor would point, and I waited till I heard the whip coming, and then I cried out.

louder every time. Sometimes it would drop on one of the cuts that had gone before, and it was — bad then. I could have sworn my back was as big again as it should be, for after the cat was pulled sharp back the flesh went after it, and rose up till I knew I was bleeding, and that the skin had burst. The blood ran down into my trousers thick, no cheese (mistake) about it. How did it hurt me? Why, every now and then the cat lapped round my chest, and that was worst of all. It knocked me out of wind, my breath went as if I'd jumped into cold water, choking like, and my mouth as dry as could be. I'd nothing to chew, so I hung on to the rings with my hands as hard as I could, and this only pulled my chest across the wood and made my back tighter. I bled a good deal, but I got the two dozen, and I felt every odd 'un (each one). The last was as bad as the first, every bit of it, if not a trifle smarter, but I shouldn't have minded if they'd laid it on quicker. It was the slow time that licked me, and if I'd had the regulation three dozen I think it would have done for me. It's all stupid about not feeling it after the first five or six. Your back don't grow dead (numb) at all, but only gets tender as you get more of it. Is there anything else like a bashing? Nothing that I know of. I've had most kinds of knocking about, but it licks all; there's no punishment comes anywhere near it. It's as bad while you're waiting as when you're getting it, and both are smart. When I was taken down I was properly done over, and my back was bleeding in a dozen places. I was swelled all round, too, in a way you couldn't believe, and I couldn't button my trousers or put my braces on, although, before I was scrat I could have wrapped my trouser's band half a dozen inches over. They were prison clothes, and they throw them at you, and ain't particular about the fit. I was sore for a good many days, but I wouldn't go to hospital or see the doctor. I knew I'd to go through the mill, and I meant to do every bit of it without flinching. I gave my head to it, and when one of the screws came round and asked me if my back had done bleeding I told him I was all right. I went to chapel the day after the bashing, for I wouldn't give in, though I needn't have gone unless I liked.

"I stayed in gaol 13 weeks, and was then sent to the Bank (Millbank Prison). My back was healed then, but the marks were there, and when I got in the bath with the others, they made some remarks about it, but I didn't care. There were a dozen of us from Manchester, and we were such thin, poor-looking devils the doctor said we must be badly off in this part of the country. I was put to the tailoring, but I didn't know which finger to put the thimble on until I was shown. It was only prison work, and I managed in time to do pretty well. There was a navvy put to same work, but he couldn't do it at all. Yes, we were treated well; but the legs (low thieves) were the dirtiest lot I



ever met. They'd do anything to get in favour with the screws, or even to get a smile from the big men. You see some few of us couldn't eat our food, and we'd give our loaf to a pal who could. One of these legs would think, 'I can't get it myself, and nobody else shall.' So he goes and peaches (informs), and gets us three days' solitary, stuck in a dark cell, with boards to lie on and a rug to cover us. After I'd been at the Bank for ten months I went to Dartmoor, after getting the doctor to examine my chest. I said I wanted to go, but he told me it would finish me. I went though; and the other doctor there said a little field work would do me good. It was in the summer, and I thought I'd touched (been fortunate). We went out on the moor and had to cut turf, with the warders with us and the other guard with guns always in sight. I found it was hard work cutting turf with our big knives, for they make each one do the same amount of cutting, so that the weakest has to keep up with the strongest. They work against each other there, and it was so hot that we'd have pulled our shirts off if they'd have let us. We'd little sheet-iron cells to sleep in and to eat our meals in, not above seven feet long by five feet wide, all running up the middle of the big yard, with doors facing opposite ways. The officials were always down (severe) upon us; if you looked at another man you would be spotted, and if you spoke, you were brought and tried before the Governor, just like 'sizes, only no jury. They punish you sharp, and if you try to escape they shoot at you as long as they can see you. Three got shot while I was there, and one took it stiffly and got two or three slugs into him. If I had my time over again I'd sooner do it at Belle Vue grinding air (turning the cranks so many thousand times per day) than down there. 'What do the guns (thieves) think of a bashing?' Well, anyone who puts up a man for anything under a book with two or three hundred (pounds) in it is a dunce—a reg'lar flat. It ain't worth the doing when you know what's waiting for you, and you're certain of getting a bashing. No good cross-man would think of it; it's only these green 'uns; these labourers who say: 'I'm starving; there's two or three bob if I put this bloke up and turn him over (ransack his pockets). I'll do it.' That's the sort of flats who do it, and sometimes it settles the man clean off; but none of us fly mobs will do the grip now."

He had got so excited while talking that he had jumped off his seat, and, with the enthusiasm of his craft, was suiting the action to the word by showing me how the hug was done in "putting-up" any unfortunate who might be "spotted." He gripped his left wrist with his right hand, threw his left elbow outwards and upwards, and then, tightening every muscle, depressed both elbows and drew his left towards his chin. The movement was quick as could be, and I recognised in a minute how futile resistance would have been if a man's neck had been enclosed in such a powerful

grip. The garotte is unquestionably supreme as a means to induce rapid insensibility in a victim.

Such was the tale as related to me, almost as coherently as I have given it, though it required many questions, carefully framed and put, to elicit the information. In no case have I used language that was not actually uttered, and if many of the words seem strange as issuing from a convict's mouth, they are truly his own, and not of my choosing.

#### CHAPTER X.

### CANAL-STREET: GINGER LIZ AND COCKNEY JIM.

I have described the life that hides itself in Charter-street, Deansgate, and Gaythorn, and in this, my concluding article, I shall cover the remaining ground that can properly be dealt with, though it is scarcely so prolific as the districts that have already been under notice. Its area is much wider, however, though its special criminality is decidedly of an inferior order, and is so scattered that it loses much of the dangerous character which is developed when its component parts are comprehensively grouped together. It has many features peculiarly its own, and as it consists of three detached localities, these features are pretty distinctly marked in each. The districts are Canal-street, Ancoats, and London-road. The first-mentioned is the worst of the three, and is of the Wood-street type, than which very few grades of life are lower. It is perhaps a *terra incognita* to nine-tenths of the inhabitants of the city, and yet there is included within its limits enough vice to start any ordinarily-sized civilised town. It lies within a few yards of one of our principal thoroughfares, but is as far removed from it, socially, as the deepest crime from the most exalted honesty.

Lying at the back of the wood-yard in Oxford-street, which is almost opposite the railway station, Canal-street has really for some distance only one side composed of houses, as the canal runs flush with the roadway, from which it is separated by a low brick wall. The level of the canal is considerably lower than that of the street, and two or three locks mark the steep descent of the waters. The single row of houses mentioned are, with one or two exceptions, thoroughly disreputable, and their open doors are at night time thronged with men and women, who sit on the steps and chaff any strange passer-by in a manner more pointed than polite. I was initiated into the mysteries of several of these places, and Irish Poll was introduced to me in an incoherent state of intoxication. Her residence was a fair specimen of many others, being decently furnished, though without elaboration, and it afforded a striking contrast to that of Dirty Alf, the front room of which was gorgeous with mirrors, mahogany, and mixed materials, from the gilded chandelier to the fanciful

china ornaments. Curtains of richest colouring were festooned over the window, and a soft yielding carpet invitingly sank under my feet. Luxury itself could not have asked for more, and every attention had been paid to the minutest details, the walls of the passage, or hall, perhaps, as the proprietor would prefer it to be called, being fancifully lined with a classic pattern in subdued chocolate colour. The gaslights lit up all with their rich blaze; and a more perfect whited sepulchre I never saw, for Vice reigns triumphant here—criminality that can scarcely be touched upon. And yet a more productive centre of crime it would be hard to find, for here finds its way the money stolen from employer or other victim, and viciousness reproduces itself in many shapes. Men may enter the street honest and may leave it thieves; for money that was not their own they have recklessly squandered, and the harpies have effected a change that too often leads direct to further roguery. I instance this house as it is only one of many others that are for some reason tolerated as part of our social fabric; and as affording a means of solution to the mystery of how respectable men—young men especially—become thieves, apparently spontaneously. Not professional thieves, stealing for the sake of getting a living without working, but secret pilferers from till or safe, obtaining means to gratify their sensual appetites. On the surface all is plain sailing for a long time, but at last comes detection, and the master to his horror finds his clerk or warehouseman is as despicable a felon as the poor wretch who makes Charter-street his home when not provided for by a beneficent Government in a comfortable gaol. If the thousand upon thousand patient inquiries by the police as to where the culprit has resorted, and who were his companions, were but published, this Canal-street Palace of Sin and its fac-similes dotted over the face of our city, thick as plague spots, would show what a terrible agency is at work among us, recruiting, year by year, the ranks of the "dangerous classes" from our middle-class population.

Passing a glaring "vault," which is doing a roaring trade, I found myself in Sackville-street, and Mac ushered me into the habitation of one of our most noted characters in certain circles, who has a connection with "crooked" persons that is exceedingly remunerative. Ginger Liz, as she is euphoniously called on account of her blonde hair, is a woman of middle age, still quick and active in her movements, and with a certain cunning and suspicious look about her face which baffles description. There was nothing to attract attention in the room we entered, two or three women, and a man who looked liked a well-to-do mechanic, being its sole occupants. There was drink upon the table, and all present were taking "toothfuls" of whisky out of wine glasses. Ginger herself was seated on the sofa holding converse with the man, and as nothing of interest seemed likely to transpire I was quickly

back into the street again. I was curious to hear about the "Red 'un's" doings, and Mac "let on" at once: "Ginger, you see, sir," he said, "is a real clever 'un, and you won't meet her equal all over the city. She is as fly and knowing as the whole boilin' of us, and many a bloke down on his luck has she pulled up all square again. She's a perfect godsend too when we're jugged (locked-up), and knows every move of the court as well as Scotty himself (the slang name of one of our leading detective officers). When a good cross-man is taken in, and is dragged up at Minshull-street, she sees him as a visitor, or sends one of her women, and no matter what he wants she'll let him have it. She'll find two or three quid (sovereigns) for a lawyer, or she'll "square" the prosecutor or bounce him. If he wants to *alibi* she'll manage it first-rate, and if there's any stuff (stolen property) to be got rid of while he's in, she's the woman to do the trick. She knows it's all right with 'em, for they'll pay her double when they're out, and she mostly pulls 'em off even if they go to sessions or 'sizes. She'll get the best patterers (counsel) money can fetch, and she can put things together straight as a line if she's let alone. The d's have been down on her once or twice, but she ain't been stopped yet. It'll be hard lines for many a poor — when she's shifted. She's genuine metal, no kid (mistake)." Mac sang the praises of this Genius of Minshull-street with a fervency that was in keeping with the subject, and no doubt Ginger is an invaluable ally to the thieves who find work for our worthy justices.

Richmond-street, narrow and squalid, runs at right angles to Sackville-street and parallel with Canal-street, and the dwellers in it are of the lowest class. The houses are poorly fitted up, and many women live in the same place. The visitors to these dens are colliers from outside and hard-working labourers from within the city who think drink and debauchery the only true pleasures provided for them, and behave accordingly. I will only mention one of these, and that is where Cockney Jim reigns supreme when he is in town. In the back kitchen, furnished with the customary sofa, table, and chairs, far too numerous in proportion to the size of the room, were three women and the inevitable man, in this case an outsider "on the drunk." A quart bottle, nearly full of dark British brandy, graced the middle of the table, and a drunken, sodden wretch, clad in tawdry finery, with bleared eyes and scrofulous features, was pouring a glass of neat spirit down her throat. She drank the poison without winking, and helped herself to another, replenishing the glasses of her companions at the same time, for these women can drink with the confidence begotten of long practice, and never dream of spoiling their taste by polluting their mouths with water. Their male "friend" was subdued and maudlin, but he seemed perfectly content with these Philistines, and glared jealously at us as if expecting we were about to deprive him of the comfort derived from the



drunken endearments of these representatives of the gentler sex. We left him to his fate, and as I could not see Cockney I again requested information from Mac. It appears that Cockney attends races and various other meetings all over the country, at which he picks up a satisfactory living, but one of his means of obtaining the "needful" is by one of the cleverest tricks that has ever been in vogue. It is known as "ring-dropping," and is generally very successful when tried. Many will have been made familiar with it through newspaper reports, but for those who are still blissfully ignorant, I will unfold its mysteries. Provided with cheap gold rings, worth a few shillings, but stamped with a forged mark, and to an inexperienced eye of some value, a "sharp" and his confederate start out into the public streets. Patiently waiting until a likely victim approaches, the "sharp" walks past him and suddenly stoops, and pretends eagerly to pick something up. He has a ring in his hand, and, rising quickly, examines it with well-affected pleasure. The victim either stops out of curiosity, or else is detained by a direct appeal to congratulate the finder. The confederate comes up, and, as an innocent passer-by, also stops, asks to look at the ring, finds that it's marked, prizes it at £10 or £20, and offers to buy it for that money if the lucky-man will accompany him to his house. The said lucky man can't, as he's got to go to his work, and will lose his place if he's late. "He's an honest man he is, and must want to make money out of the ring, so he'll sell it there and then for a couple of pounds." The confederate is annoyed that he has not the amount on him, and expresses vexation that he should lose so good a bargain. The victim meanwhile has had his cupidity excited, he examines the ring, sees it's all right, thinks what an ass the fellow must be to sell it for a mere song, and after a little parley pays the £2 and makes off with his treasure. The state of his mind after visiting a jeweller may be readily imagined.

Some twenty or thirty streets in the neighbourhood of Ancoats and in the district lying to the left of London-road, very near to the railway station, were visited by us, but it was rather hard to

find thieves, though we did come across a few, scattered in courts and stray houses. In Ancoats there is a contingent of foreign adventurers, Italian organ grinders, &c., who live in one or two large lodging-houses that are well kept and have few undesirable features. The poverty of the residents in these quarters is very great, and as Mac put it, "Where there's poor people there's thieves." This is true of many streets I inspected but the proportion of dishonest persons to respectable workers is so small that, practically, in Ancoats and London-road, crime is being strangled by its intimate association with elements inimical to it. Men, who work hard all day and earn little, feel savage at seeing good-for-nothing rogues, with plenty of money, hanging about the public-houses doing nothing but enjoying themselves, and accordingly they "round" on their neighbours, and put the police in possession of valuable information as often as possible. "Ale-and-porter" work, stealing and working, is the mode of life followed by hundreds in these poor streets, and many a wretch finds his way to gaol for petty larceny, in spite of the character his unwary employer may be induced to give him.

After many nights' wanderings I considered that I had at last come to the end of my tether, and in the slums off London-road I closed my acquaintance with the phases of life I had been studying. The impression derived from my extended visits is that so completely has the police organisation gained a mastery over the classes which live by nefarious transactions that the city has been cleared of the sharpest and most dangerous thieves, who have sought "fresh fields and pastures new," where the hand of the Manchester detective cannot reach them. That this is true is proved by the very few robberies of any importance that of late years have taken place in our midst, and that, when a more than usually daring attempt is made on life or property, it is made by strangers and not by genuine residents. There are, indeed, few large cities that can compete with our own in the systematic suppression of viciousness in all its forms, as shewn in the sketches of CRIMINAL MANCHESTER.



